

HB 245 – Testimony for the Senate Committee for Public Health, Welfare, and Safety  
April 8, 2015  
Laura Ginsburg

Mr. Chair and Committee-

My name is Laura Ginsburg, and I am the co-owner of The Golden Yoke Farm and Creamery in Saint Ignatius. I have been working in the dairy industry for the past seven years, wrote my master's thesis on Montana's dairy policy, and received a Fulbright to study dairy policy in New Zealand. My partner and I have been developing our dairy and ice cream facility for three years, so we are personally and financially invested in this.

Let me be upfront – I support the sale of raw milk that is produced in safe, sanitary, and inspected facilities. I worked on dairies in Vermont, where the sale of raw milk is legal if farmers produce it under regulation, and have seen the added income it provides. If a raw milk bill passes, it is very likely that my farm will sell it; so, like the proponents, I have a personal stake in this argument.

HB-245, as it is currently written, raises quite a few questions and concerns for me.

First, the bill allows for two kinds of raw milk exemption, either under a small herd permit or a herd share. The small herd permit has testing requirements and other costs while the herd share does not. So why would someone choose to have a small herd exemption when they could do a herd share and have no mandatory paperwork, fees, or testing?

Second, under a small herd permit, the producer is responsible for testing their milk, vaccinating their cows, and ensuring the milk is cooled appropriately but there is no system in place for these to be checked. This bill, and the sponsor's fiscal note, does not allow the Department of Livestock to even review testing results. If a producer is out of compliance, it is up to them to recognize the problem, diagnose the issue, and solve it. It is also up to the producer to stop selling milk if they are out of compliance, which can span a time period of five months according to the bill's testing schedule.

Third, HB-245 allows the sale of processed dairy products such as cheese and yogurt if it is made in a home kitchen. The House and the Senate recently passed HB-478, the cottage food bill, which strictly prohibits the production and sale of dairy products in an uninspected home kitchen because they are not considered low risk items. HB-245 goes directly against this.

Finally, the dairy farmers in this state already pay for licensing, inspection costs, and facility upgrades to meet production standards. Most dairy farmers in Montana pay over \$10,000 annually just to be inspected every four to six months. Raw milk producers should pay their fair share of the burden of cost, just like any other food or agriculture business.

Based on my experience, I would recommend the following standards for raw milk production:

- Keep cow records with identification that document all vaccinations, illnesses, and any medication given;
- Keep two week's worth of daily samples in the freezer so that if someone does get sick, the milk can be tested;
- Keep a log of all people who buy milk;
- Only raw milk should be sold, not processed products;
- Cows should be milked according to Grade A industry standards, including udder cleaning practices and a clean milking environment, but not necessarily in a Grade A certified facility;
- Milking equipment needs to be cleaned after every milking and producers should be able to document and describe their process;
- The Department of Livestock should be able to inspect at least once per year, and any follow-up visits for serious issues; and
- Records of milk tests should be copied directly to the Department of Livestock for review so that any emerging issues can be handled.

None of these are hard to do, nor are they costly. Keeping records and samples is just good practice in any food production business.

The real issue at hand in Montana is not whether raw milk is healthier than pasteurized, whether the dairy industry is trying to stop this bill, or even if raw milk is safe or dangerous, but rather, can the people who want to buy raw milk, and already do, have access to a product that is as safe as it possibly can be. Better stated, how can Montana take the black market of raw milk sales into the light so that consumers and producers are able to legally benefit?

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions and have provided my written testimony with contact information.

Laura Ginsburg

406-552-5079

yum@thegoldenyoke.com